

Approved For Release 1999/09/07 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000200030069-8

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DONOVAN (LSC)

NEW YORK, FEB. 12 (AP) — IN THE NUCLEAR-MISSILE COLD WAR, BROOKLYN LAWYER JAMES BRITT DONOVAN PLAYED AN OLD-FASHIONED CLOAK-AND-DAGGER ROLE TO FREE U2 PILOT FRANCIS GARY POWERS.

RESEMBLING THE ROMANTIC NOTION OF AN OPERATIVE ONLY IN HIS PIERCING PALE BLUE EYES, THE 45-YEAR-OLD DONOVAN TOLD ABOUT HIS MISSION LAST NIGHT ON HIS RETURN HOME.

HE HAD SET THE STAGE FOR HIS DRAMA FIVE YEARS AGO, AS COURT-APPOINTED DEFENSE COUNSEL FOR COL. RUDOLF ABEL. HE HAD ARGUED THEN AGAINST THE DEATH SENTENCE, SAYING THE SOVIET MASTER SPY MIGHT BE USEFUL AT SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE--FOR JUST SUCH A TRADE AS WAS CONSUMMATED SATURDAY ON THE GLEINECKER BRIDGE BETWEEN WEST BERLIN AND POTSDAM.

THAT OPPORTUNITY APPEARED SHORTLY AFTER POWERS' TRIAL IN 1960. DONOVAN SAID MRS. ABEL AND HER EAST GERMAN LAWYER, WOLFGANG VOGEL, WROTE HIM. HE CONTACTED THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT AND LAST MONTH WAS ASKED TO NEGOTIATE, HE SAID.

LEAVING NEW YORK AS A LAWYER ON BUSINESS IN LONDON, DONOVAN SLIPPED INTO WEST BERLIN--AFTER HAVING ARRANGED A CABLE TO HIS WIFE AND FOUR CHILDREN SAYING THAT HE WAS GOING FROM LONDON TO SCOTLAND. FOR 10 DAYS, HE SAID, HE LIVED ALONE IN A HOUSE IN WEST BERLIN--WHICH HE IDENTIFIED ONLY AS OWNED BY FRIENDS--AND MADE DAILY TRIPS THROUGH THE IRON CURTAIN. IN EAST GERMANY, HE NEGOTIATED WITH IVAN SHISHKIN, SECOND SECRETARY OF THE SOVIET EMBASSY; VOGEL, WHO BY THIS TIME ALSO WAS ACTING AS ATTORNEY FOR FREDERIC L. PRYOR, AN AMERICAN STUDENT ALSO FREED IN THE TRADE, AND OTHERS, UNNAMED.

ASO

OFFICIALLY, DONOVAN SAID, HE WAS NOT IN WEST BERLIN, SO HE HAD TO USE HIS OWN INITIATIVE TO CROSS THE COMMUNIST BORDER--THROUGH FOUR ARMED CONTROL POINTS. HE DID SO BY BRAZENLY DEMANDING, IN GERMAN, "TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER." ON THE FIRST DAY.

AND EACH DAY THEREAFTER HE REPEATED IT "WITH A LITTLE MORE CONVICTION AND A LITTLE MORE AUTHORITY," HE SAID.

ON SATURDAY MORNING, AT 8:20 A.M., DONOVAN STOOD ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE BRIDGE, FACING SHISHKIN ON THE COMMUNIST SIDE. WITH DONOVAN WERE A U.S. OFFICIAL FROM BERLIN AND A FORMER ASSOCIATE OF POWERS--WHOM HE WOULD NOT IDENTIFY--TO IDENTIFY THE PILOT. TWO SOVIET OFFICIALS WERE WITH SHISHKIN.

FIVE YARDS BEHIND EACH PARTY, FLANKED BY TWO GUARDS APIECE, STOOD POWERS AND ABEL.

"AFTER SHISHKIN AND I AGREED THE FORMALITIES HAD BEEN COMPLIED WITH, ONE OF OUR MEN CAME FORWARD AND IDENTIFIED POWERS, AND ONE OF THEIRS IDENTIFIED ABEL," DONOVAN SAID.

"WE WITHHELD ACTION UNTIL WE WERE NOTIFIED THAT PRYOR HAD BEEN RELEASED BY THE EAST GERMAN GOVERNMENT. . . FAR DISTANT FROM THE BRIDGE. THIS TOOK POSSIBLY 15 MINUTES."

UNTIL THE WORD CAME AND THE TWO PRISONERS CROSSED THE BRIDGE, DONOVAN ADDED, "BECAUSE THE MATTER CONCERNED THREE GOVERNMENTS, I KEPT MY FINGERS CROSSED."

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